IN THEIR OWN WORDS

A LITERARY COMPANION TO THE PREHISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY OF LONDON

BY KEVIN FLUDE

An 'And Did Those Feet?' Book

Gathered in this book are a series of historic and literary quotations examining the origins of London and the activities and life of the Britons, Romans and the early English. The quotations illustrate the way that the ancients felt about the events that unfolded before them. They give insight into past lives, hopes, fears, and prejudices. The quotations are brought together by a commentary that provides the necessary background to appreciate the text. The book concentrates on the history of London but most of the quotations have a general application to the period.

DEDICATION

This booklet was first produced in around 1992 and was a development of a literary tour that the author and Paul Herbert compiled for the City Disc project for the BBC Interactive Television Unit, in the pioneering days of laser discs and CD-Interactive!

It is dedicated to Beryl Hendriks who died in 1991. She attended many of the lectures, walks and tours given by the author and colleagues at Citisights of London. Beryl was one of our most dedicated supporters, a lovely person, and she made what we did worth while.

THE AUTHOR

Kevin Flude has worked all his life in the study of the past - either as an archaeologist, lecturer or Museum Curator. He has excavated in Britain and abroad; and worked at the Museum of London, Victoria and Albert Museum. Old Operating Theatre, Museum and Herb Garret, Museum of Garden History and the Brunel Engine House. He has written several books and multimedia titles on London

INTRODUCTION

As a lecturer and writer on the history of London I have frequently discovered that a short snippet from a contemporary source is worth any number of pages penned by an academic historian. The academic can give a measured, scholarly view of the past made objective by the passage of time but only the contemporary, or near contemporary, witness can provide an idea of how it actually felt at the time. People may argue about how representative that view may be, and what prejudices informed it but we know at least that it was, at the least, the opinion of one contemporary witness.

The quotations have been linked together with a commentary to make sense of them.

For more information on London – look at http://history-of-london.wikiverse.org/.

PROLOGUE - THE LEGEND OF LONDON

Britain is

> ***A World by itself, and we will nothing pay***
>
> ***For wearing our own noses***
>
> ***Cloten in William Shakespeare's Cymbeline***

When, in the 1980's, I first made reference to Celtic London - there was something liberating, something anti-establishment about so naming the inhabitants of the London area before the coming of the Romans. It felt as if the term Celtic gave the Ancient Britons some dignity and culture. It distanced them from the image we were taught at school of dirty, savage, hairy people daubed in woad who somehow deserved to be conquered by the organised Romans. The use of the term allowed the exploration of the canon of Celtic literature, myth and legend to put some bones on the meagre archaeological records that were then available.

Rather annoyingly the late 1990's saw the 'Celts' fallen victim to political correctness. Simon James of the British Museum, in an interesting summary of a long debate, pointed out that there is no contemporary reference to the Celts in Britain in the Roman period. The idea of a Celtic culture was, he claimed, an 18th Century invention. Talk of an archaeological Celtic culture stretching across Europe implied, he believed, little more than a geographical area in which dynastic intermarriage and trade had produced a similarity in aristocratic convention. The greater detail given by 1990's excavations had revealed that beneath the seeming similarity of culture was, in fact, a huge variegated group of cultures with much local diversity.

James, did allow the Celtic language to be the one remaining unifying strand across 'Celtic' Europe, and so our search for the original literature of London must begin with the Celtic speaking Britons. The Britons in the London area were divided up into different political or tribal groupings - in the area of Essex were the Trinovantes, to the north and west were the formidable Catevellauni, to the south-west were the Atrebates, and to the East were the Cantiaci. Although many of the tribal names are shared with tribes in Northern France Julius Caesar claimed:

> ***The interior of Britain is inhabited by people who claim, on the strength of their own tradition, to be indigenous. The coastal areas are inhabited by invaders who crossed from Belgium for the sake of plunder and then, when the fighting was over, settled there.***

Sadly, the Britons left no written records of their own - for reasons explained by Julius Caesar in his description of the religious leaders of the Celts - the Druids:

> ***It is said that during their training they learn by heart a great many verses, so many that some people spend 20 years studying the doctrine. They do not think it right to commit their teachings to writing, although for almost all other purposes, for example, for public and private accounts, they use the Greek alphabet.***
>
> ***I suppose this practice began originally for two reasons: they did not want their doctrines to be accessible to the ordinary people, and they did not want their pupils to rely on the written word and so neglect to train their memories. For it does usually happen that if people have the help of written documents, they do not pay as much attention to learning by heart, and so let their memories become less efficient.***
>
> ***The doctrine of the Druids was invented in Britain and was brought from there into Gaul; even today those who want to study the doctrine in greater detail usually go to Britain to learn there...***

So we can be sure that the Britons of the London area had a rich oral tradition but did any of it survive the Roman, English, Danish and Norman invasions? Geoffrey of Monmouth, writing in the 12th Century claimed to have recorded some of it but he is notoriously unreliable. Writing in Latin, he tells us fabulous tales of the origins of Briton and the history of the Kings of Britain, from before 1000BC to the Saxon period. He introduces a complete genealogy of Kings, some known from no other sources, and others world famous. The latter include: Leir, Lud, Cymbeline, Old King Coel, Uther Pendragon, Merlin and Arthur.

He describes the foundation of London by the Trojan Brutus, great grandson of Aeneas as follows:

> ***Once he had divided up his kingdom, Brutus decided to build a capital. In pursuit of this plan, he visited every part of the land in search of a suitable spot. He came at length to the River Thames, walked up and down its banks and so chose a site suited to his purpose. There then he built a city and called it Troia Nova. It was known by this name for long ages after, but finally by a corruption of the word it came to be called Trinovantum.***
>
> **After Lud, the brother of Cassivellaunus, who fought Julius Caesar, had seized command of the government of the kingdom, he surrounded the capital with lofty walls and with towers built with extraordinary skill, and he ordered it to be called Kaerlud, or Lud's City, from his own name.**

Subsequently the town becomes know as Kaerlundein, and then London. The stories of Brutus and Lud are not supported by any other credible evidence and so the simplest explanation is that Geoffrey invented Brutus and Lud to give an explanation for the origin of the names of Britain, London and Ludgate?

However, Geoffrey himself claims to have based his work on **a certain very ancient book written in the British language**. Unfortunately the book, if it ever existed, does not survive. He obviously had access, sometimes second hand, to classical authors, Celtic authors such as Nennius and Gildas, to Saxon and Norman writers such as Bede and obviously, the Bible. He uses his sources freely, and is happy to contradict their accounts on occasion, and where they are silent he fills in the gaps for dramatic effect. For example, he makes the historical Cassivellaunus the brother of Lud and quotes correspondence between Caesar and Cassivellaunus on the subject of their joint Trojan ancestry! In short, as a historian he is totally unreliable!

But this should not mislead us into constructing an image of Geoffrey as a latter day forger on a par with the author of the Hitler Diaries. He was writing in a different tradition from that of today, at a time when the monasteries made a habit of forging ancient documents and sponsoring hagiographies of saints based on little more than divine inspiration. The histographic tradition that Geoffrey was working in dated back to the Ancient Greeks and even great historians such as Thucydides were happy to make up appropriate speeches for the main protagonists to add drama to history.

The point is that Geoffrey's motivations are unlikely to be similar to a modern forger's. He was attempting to pull together a coherent and continuous history of the Kings of Britain from all sources available to him - including disconnected fragments of folk-tales and popular ballads as well as accepted historical sources. To fill other gaps Geoffrey did what many historians do, he turned to place name evidence thereby creating plausible origins for the great cities (London named after King Lud, Colchester from King Cole, Leicester after King Leir and so on). He then correlated the whole against classical sources wherever possible as the Bible and Classical myths and legends provided the only reputable chronological framework available. Where his material was a bit thin he may have followed his instincts as a good story teller and simply made up the missing parts.

The possibility exists, however, that some of Geoffrey's material is based on genuine folk tradition. The problem is that we can believe Geoffrey only when his work is verified by other sources; we can disregard him when better sources expose his writing as obvious nonsense, but we have no means of evaluating the rest of his work. These stories could be complete fabrication, the only remembrance of a charming folk-tale, a garbled version of real events, or the whole truth and nothing but! Our inability to disentangle fact from fiction is such a great pity because his stories would be so much more valuable if we could at least accord them the status of genuine folk-tale.

Historians deal harshly with Geoffrey but archaeology is beginning to provide some possible suggestions that there is more truth to Geoffrey's work than hitherto thought. It has long been realised that his story about a Roman massacre in London is based on the discovery of a large number of dismembered skulls in the river. We now think the skulls may be religious offerings rather than remains of executions but the story is based upon some 'archaeological observations'. Geoffrey did not simply make it up. Geoffrey claims that St Peter's Church in London was founded in the Roman period. Archaeologists have long objected to this theory on the basis that the Church is situated above the site of the Roman Basilica - which is was assumed had survived through the Roman period. However, the Museum of London has shown that the Basilica was pulled down around 300AD - making a Roman date for the foundation of the Church not at all impossible. Geoffrey places the story in the 2nd Century which given the location of the Basilica is still highly unlikely but perhaps Geoffrey did have access to a genuine tradition.

Another famous Geoffrey story leads to the same conclusion - Geoffrey states that Stonehenge was originally built in Ireland and brought to Briton by magical means by Merlin. He has the date wrong, the country of origin wrong and the means of transportation seems highly unlikely but most archaeologists now accept that the Bluestones at Stonehenge came from Wales, probably brought by boat and may once have been set in a different setting than that they now occupy. It seems possible that Geoffrey is using a dimly remembered folk tale to spin his tale of Stonehenge.

More powerfully though, recent work in the west country, has shown that Geoffrey had access to information about Tintagel in Cornwall that has only just re-emerged thanks to archaeological discovery. Geoffrey locates Tintagel as the place of birth of Arthur. Sceptics assumed this location was based on Geoffrey's knowledge of the spectacular medieval Tintagel Castle owned by the Dukes of Cornwall. However, it now seems that the castle was not built until after Geoffrey had written the book. Why did he then choose Tintagel? Archaeologists have now shown that there was a Dark Age site on Tintagel, one of the biggest and richest yet found in Britain. It has recently been reinterpreted as a secular settlement of high status. In the parish church they have also found royal or aristocratic grave mounds of the right period. It seems more likely that the Dukes of Cornwall built their castle on the spot in a moment of romantic folly following Geoffrey's revelations about Arthur's birthplace rather than Geoffrey based his story after seeing the romantic setting of the Dukes of Cornwall!.

It is therefore more likely that Geoffrey was using a genuine folk-tradition in placing Arthur at Tintagel than simply making it up. If we can show that this is so then how much more invaluable evidence is hiding among his work?

It has to be said that Geoffrey's overall credibility has been damaged by his `translation' of his source material into a landscape familiar to his contemporary readers - he loses archaic features which would add veracity to his source material.

So we are left with many problems but we need to remember that however difficult it is to interpret his work as history, he preserves some thundering good tales, many probably originating from Celtic sources, and which deserve greater currency. It is appropriate to finish this discussion with a quotation from the most famous Geoffrey of Monmouth story - indeed one of the most famous stories in English literature - that of King Lear, as interpreted by Shakespeare. The story is interesting

in that it reflects two common Celtic concerns. Firstly, a fierce vanity reflected in Lear's anguish at his loss of status. Secondly, although Lear may lament his treatment at the hands of his women, it reflects the independence granted to Celtic women.

The following scene occurs when the aged Lear is told he must reduce his retinue from 100 to 50 while being shuttled between his daughters Regan and Goneril.

Lear: Return to her? and fifty men dismis'd?
No, rather I abjure all roofs, and choose
To wage against the enmity o' the air;
To be a comrade with the wolf and owl,
Necessity's sharp pinch! Return with her!
Why, the hot-blooded France, that dowerless took
Our youngest born, I could as well be brought
To knee his throne, and, squire-like, pension beg
To keep base life afoot. Return with her!
Persuade me rather to be slave and sumpter
To this detested groom.
(pointing at Oswald)
Goneril: At your choice sir.
Lear. I prithee, daughter, do not make me mad:
I will not trouble thee, my child; farewell.
We'll no more meet, no more see one another;
But yet thou are my flesh, my blood, my daughter;
Or rather a disease that's in my flesh,
Which I must needs call mine: thou art a boil,
A plague-sore, an embossed carbuncle,
In my corrupted blood, But I'll not chide thee;
Let shame come when it will, I do not call it:
I do not bid the thunder-bearer shoot,
Nor tell tales of thee to high-judging Jove.
Mend when thou canst; be better at thy leisure:
I can be patient; I can stay with Regan,
I and my hundred knights.
Regan
Not altogether so:

And Regan goes on to explain that she cannot now grant Lear as large a retinue as before.

THE BRITONS

Thwarted in our search for any reliable source of information on the Celtic people of London we must search further afield for enlightenment as to their character. Our first source is the glorious and unique Celtic artwork of the immediate pre-Roman period, typified by the Battersea Shield. The artwork is sinuous, informed with a deep and well understood structure and yet used with a freedom and rhythm that makes classical art seem stiffly formal, dully symmetrical, and formulaic.

The artwork ties in with the picture derived from classical and Irish sources of the Celts as a free-thinking and artistic race, with a natural boldness but unhampered by natural caution.

The Romans were unimpressed by Celtic cultural attainments largely because they were not based on town life - the very basis of civilisation as the Romans defined it. However, they were impressed by the Celtic prowess particularly as Rome had briefly fallen to the Celts in around 386 BC. Led by Brennius and Bellovesus they

> ***flamed into the uncontrollable anger which is characteristic of their race, and set forward, with terrible speed, on the path to Rome. Terrified townships rushed to arms as the avengers were roaring by; men fled from the fields for their lives; and from all the immense host, covering miles of ground with its straggling masses of horse and foot the cry went up "To Rome!"***

Livy, The Early History of Rome

Capturing all of Rome except the Capitol, the Gauls eventually settled for a cash payment and retired. Geoffrey of Monmouth of course adopts the Gallic leaders, Brennius and Bellinus into the British Royal Family. Billingsgate, he says is named after Bellinus!

The Celts were a fearsome sight in battle as the historian Diodorus Siculus makes clear:

> ***Their aspect is terrifying ... They are very tall in stature, with rippling muscles under clear white skin. Their hair is blond, but not naturally so: they bleach it, to this day, artificially, washing it in lime and combing it back from their foreheads. They look like wood-demons, their hair thick and shaggy like a horse's mane. Some of these are clean-shaven, but others - especially those of high rank - shave their cheeks but leave a moustache that covers the whole mouth and, when they eat and drink, acts like a sieve, trapping particles of food... The way they dress is astonishing: they wear brightly coloured and embroidered shirts, with trousers called bracae and cloaks fastened at the shoulder with a brooch, heavy in winter, light in summer. The cloaks are striped or checkered in design, with the separate checks close together and in various colours.***
>
> *1*

Classical authors note their propensity for alcohol and fortified with mead, Celtic ale and Roman wine they were quarrelsome, boastful and every ready for a fight. Athenaeus, quoting Posidonius, writes:

> ***They also use cumin in their drinks... the drink of the wealthy classes is wine imported***

[1] http://www.gallica.co.uk/celts/clothing.htm

> ***from Italy or from the territory of Marseilles. This is unadulterated but sometimes a little water is added. The lower classes drink wheaten beer prepared with honey, but most people drink it plain. It is called corma. They use a common cup, drinking a little at a time, not more than a mouthful, but they do it rather frequently.***
>
> ***The Celts sometimes engage in single combat at dinner. Assembling in arms they engage in mock battle and mutual thrust and parry. But sometimes wounds are inflicted and the irritation caused by this may lead even to the slaying of the opponent unless the bystanders hold them back... And in former times when the hind-quarters were served up, the bravest hero took the thigh piece, and if another man claimed it they stood up and fought in single combat to the death.***

Strabo reports:

> ***The whole race ... is madly fond of war, high-spirited and quick to battle but otherwise straight-forward and not of evil character. And so when they are stirred up they assemble in their bands for battle, quite openly and without forethought; so that they are easily handled by those who desire to outwit them. For at any time or place and on whatever pretext you stir them up you will have them ready to face danger, even if they have nothing on their side but their own strength and courage.***

But there is another side to the Celts. Their philosophy was summed up to St Patrick thus:

> ***Truth in the Heart, Strength in the Arm, and Honesty in Speech.***

Their apparent blood-thirstiness may be partly explained by their belief in reincarnation and as Lucan records they regarded death

> ***as only a pause in a long life.***

They were also of a reflective nature, keen on learning, delighting in word-play and riddles, helped by a tradition of story-telling which honed their memories and dexterity with words.

One of the most interesting rituals of the Celts is the Cult of the Severed Head. This is clearly recorded in London from extensive finds of skulls in the Thames, and particularly in the River Walbrook which used to flow down from Moorgate under what is now the Bank of England and into the Thames at Dowgate. It was thought that these were the result of some massacre during the Roman period, but now archaeologists prefer the theory that they are ritual offerings to the Spirits of the holy brook. Diodorus Siculus wrote:

> ***They cut off the heads of enemies slain in battle and attach them to the necks of their horses ... and they nail up these first fruits upon their houses, just as do those who lay low wild animals in certain kinds of hunting. They embalm in cedar oil the heads of the most distinguished enemies, and preserve them carefully in a chest, and display them with pride to strangers, saying that for this head one of their ancestors, or his father, or the man himself, refused the offer of a large sum of money.***

The confirmation of a cult of the severed head in London has helped authenticate one piece of Celtic literature about London. It occurs in the Welsh collection called the Mabinogion, written down in the 14th Century from an oral tradition that may have dated back centuries. The story is `Branwen Daughter of Llyr.' Branwen is the sister of Bendigeidfran, king of Britain, crowned in London, and otherwise known as Bran the Blessed Raven. Branwen is married off to Mattholwch King of Ireland. In Ireland she is dismissed from the King's chamber and made to cook in the court. Her brother swears vengeance for the humiliation of his sister, and leads an army against the Irish. Bran, being tall, wades across the Irish Channel accompanied by his invasion force. Two Irish swineherds on the

beach report 'wondrous news':

> ***A forest have we seen upon the deep, in a place where we never saw a single tree... (and) a big mountain close to the forest, and that moving, and a lofty ridge on the mountain and a lake on each side of the ridge and the forest and the mountain and all those things moving.***

Branwen reports that the forest is in actual fact the masts of ships, the mountain is Bran, the ridge is his nose, and the two lakes his eyes. The British defeat the Irish in bloody battle but Bran is wounded in the foot with a poisoned spear.

> ***And then Bendigeidfran commanded that his own head should be struck off. "And take the head," he said, " and carry it to the White Mount in London, and bury it with its face towards France. And you will be a long time upon the road... And the head will be as pleasant company to you as ever it was at best when it was on me***

After 80 years they return to London and bury the head in the White Mount:

> ***And because of those fourscore years it was called the Assembly of the Wondrous Head... And when it was buried, that was one of the Three Happy Concealments, and one of the Three Unhappy Disclosures when it was disclosed, for no plague would ever come across the sea to this island so long as the head was in that concealment.***

According to legend the disclosure was made by King Arthur who felt that the kingdom needed no protection other than himself, and the successful conquest of the Saxons was laid at the door of Arthur because of his vanity in digging up Bran's head. The interesting feature of this story is the identification of the White Mount with the White Tower of the Tower of London, and as the reader will doubtless realise the story of the Ravens in the Tower protecting Britain from invasion is a dimly-remembered version of the genuine folk-legend of the head of Bran the Blessed Raven.

THE ROMANS

The Celtic oral tradition means that we have to turn to Latin for the very first literary quotation describing the London area, from Caesar's `Battle for Gaul':

> ***When I discovered what the enemy's plans were, I led the army to the River Thames and the Territory of Cassivellaunus. There is only one place where the river can be forded, and even there with difficulty. When we reached it, I noticed large enemy forces drawn up on the opposite bank. The bank had also been fortified with sharp stakes fixed along it, and, as I discovered from prisoners and deserters, similar stakes had been driven into the river bed and were concealed beneath the water.***
>
> ***I immediately gave orders for the cavalry to go ahead and the legions to follow them. As the infantry crossed, only their heads were above the water, but they pressed on with such speed and determination that both infantry and cavalry were able to attack together. The enemy, unable to stand up to this combined force, abandoned the river bank and took to flight***
>
> ***...Cassivellaunus had now given up all hope of fighting a pitched battle. He disbanded most of his forces, keeping only some 4,000 charioteers with whom he kept a close watch on our line of march. He kept a short way from our route, concealing himself in the woods and thickets, and when he discovered the areas through which we should be marching, he drove the inhabitants and their cattle out of the fields there and into the woods. Then, whenever our cavalry had ventured any distance into the fields to get plunder or devastate the country, he sent his charioteers out of the woods by every road and track to attack them.***
>
> ***Our men were in great danger from such clashes, and fear of them prevented us from ranging far afield. The result was that I could not allow the cavalry to go any distance from the column of infantry; thus the damage our cavalry could inflict on the Britons by burning and ravaging their land was limited by the capacity of our infantry, when they were tired from strenuous marching, to give them protection.***
>
> ***In the meantime the Trinovantes sent a deputation to me. They are perhaps the strongest tribe (civitas) in the southeast of Britain, and it was from them that young Mandubracius had come to me in Gaul to put himself under my protection, having had to flee for his life after his father, the king of the tribe, was killed by Cassivellaunus.***

This piece has fascinating tactical information. Firstly, Caesar appears to know of only one ford, while archaeologist have located a number of possible fords: at Westminster, Battersea, and Brentford for example. This may suggest that the Roman forces were deliberately fed disinformation in order to make them attempt their crossing at the most heavily defended point! It also suggests that the boundary of the territory of Cassivellaunus (leader of the Catevellauni) was along the Thames. This is important as it suggests a strong reason for the absence of a large settlement here: a boundary between warring tribes is not the best place for a settlement.

The tactics of the British appear to have inflicted real damage on the Romans, and reflect rather better on the Celts that classical sources normally suggest. Although the Romans were able to win one more set-piece engagement at Cassivellaunus's stronghold, the Romans left Britain, and did not return for 90 years.

The noise of battle is described evocatively in an Irish story 'The raid of Cuailnge':

> ***The noise and the tumult, the din and the thunder, the clamour and the outcry ... the shock of shields and the smiting of spears and the loud striking of swords, the clashing of***

helmets, the clamour of breastplates, the friction of the weapons and the vehemence of the feats of arms, the straining of ropes, the rattle of wheels, the trampling of the horses' hooves and the creaking of the chariots, and the loud voices of heroes and warriors.

The hard-fought `victory' won by Caesar did not entirely convince his fellow Romans as Cicero reveals in a letter to Atticus. Cicero has just received correspondence from the war zone from his brother and Caesar himself. He writes:

It is known that the approaches to the island are "fenced about with daunting cliffs" and it has also become clearer that there is not a scrap of silver on the island; there's no prospect of booty except slaves - and I don't suppose you are expecting any knowledge of literature or music among them.

In another letter he reports:

The campaign in Britain is over; hostages have been taken and although there's no booty a tribute has been levied.

The geographer Strabo repeats the suggestion that Britain was not worth the effort to invade:

Although the Romans could have possessed Britain, they scorned to do so, for they saw that there was nothing at all to fear from Britain, since they are not strong enough to cross over and attack us. No corresponding advantage would arise by taking over and holding the country. For at present more seems to accrue from the customs duties on their commerce than direct taxation could supply if we deduct the costs of maintaining an army to garrison the island and collect the tribute.

...The deified Caesar crossed over twice to the island, but came back in haste, without accomplishing much or proceeding very far inland.

Roman propaganda aside it is clear that the Britons scored a notable success. But the campaign also sowed the seeds of their eventual defeat. The Romans could now claim jurisdiction over the island, and could intervene in internal affairs - a fact exploited by displaced aristocrats who fled to Rome for help in regaining lost territories. Although the Romans claimed to have no interest in following up Caesar `visit' Augustus, and Caligula both made preparations for invasion, but were prevented by internal affairs from proceeding.

CIVILISATION - ROMAN STYLE

Not all the epigrams I write

Belong to naughtiness and the night:

You'll find a few that can be read

Before midday, with a clear head.

Epigrams of Martial, Book Eleven

Although contact with the Roman Empire had increased after Caesar's visits, the full `benefits' of Roman civilisation did not arrive until after the invasion of 43 AD. This was ordered by the Emperor Claudius. Cassius Dio records:

The Britons now fell back on the river Thames, at a point near where it enters the sea, and at high tide forms a pool. They crossed over easily because they knew where to find firm ground and an easy passage. But the Romans in trying to follow them were not so successful. However, the Germans again swam across, and other troops got over by a

bridge a little upstream, after which they attacked the barbarians from several sides at once, and killed many of their number...

Having won the crucial battle for control of the Thames the Romans awaited the arrival of the Emperor. He wished to participate in the campaign, which had succeeded where the illustrious Julius Caesar had failed. The actual site of the Thames crossing can not be fixed for certain although the early Roman road system suggests that the Romans crossed the river at Westminster before they built a bridge on the site of the present day London Bridge. The mention of a bridge by Cassius Dio, who was writing in the early third Century. is intriguing. He may have been mistaken, the Celts may have had a bridge, or the Romans may have set up a pontoon bridge.

The lack of strong evidence for Claudian settlement in London leads archaeologists to believe that the town was set up by the Romans in around 50 AD. The absence of evidence for a major pre-Roman settlement suggests Londinium was a Roman new town. It is therefore likely that it was the most Roman of all British towns, as it did not have to cater for a population with its own traditions. It would have had a large contingent from the continent, swarming in to exploit the new province. However, as it was situated in one of the most densely occupied areas of Britain, it must soon have attracted a strong native element.

Early London then would have been an intriguing mixture of administrators, soldiers, financiers and merchants from around the Roman world. A large element would have come from Gaul, like the province's financial administrator Classicianus whose tombstone is in London and who was responsible for softening the savage Roman reprisals after the Boudican Revolt of AD 61 . Native Celts are attested in inscriptions and the discovery of Celtic religious iconography. How then would the various communities have got on?

Our first piece of evidence is reported in a revealing piece by the architect Vitruvius, written in the first Century AD:

`Further, it is owing to the rarity of the atmosphere that southern nations, with their keen intelligence due to the heat, are very free and swift in the devising of schemes, while northern nations, being enveloped in a dense atmosphere, and chilled by moisture from the obstructing air, have but a sluggish intelligence. That this is so, we may see from the case of snakes. Their movements are most active in hot weather ... in winter weather ... [they are] rendered torpid and motionless. It is therefore no wonder that man's intelligence is made keener by warm air and duller by cold.

But although southern nations have the keenest wits, and are infinitely clever in forming schemes, yet the moment it comes to displaying valour, they succumb because manliness of spirit is sucked out of them by the sun. On the other hand, men born in cold countries are indeed readier to meet the shock of arms with great courage and without timidity, but their wits are so slow that they will rush to the charge inconsiderately and inexpertly thus defeating their own devices. Such being nature's arrangement of the universe ... the truly perfect territory, situated under the middle of the heaven and having on each side the entire extent of the world and its countries, is that which is occupied by the Roman people.

This is one of the first recorded instances of climatic determinism, a classic use of empirical evidence and, curiously at odds with our contemporary distrust of the peoples from hot countries!

The Celtic response to conquest is easy to imagine, although being a warlike nation, perhaps they might have found the injustice of conquest easier to bear. Caesar reported a Celtic speech which suggests that this was not the case:

The Cimbri [a fellow Celtic tribe] devastated our lands and did us great harm, but in the end [they] leave our country and move on elsewhere. They left us our freedom, with our

own laws and land. But what the Romans are after is quite different ...they want ... to settle on our land among our tribes, and bind us in slavery for ever.

This is a constant refrain in speeches put into the mouths of anti-Roman war leaders: that Roman conquest was slavery.

But despite heroic resistance the Celts - lacking an adequate infrastructure - were unable to withstand the roman military and administrative machine. The inevitability of conquest was an important factor in the Celtic response, and the ending of inter-tribal war a considerable bonus. The following quotation from the Roman historian Tacitus suggests that implacable opposition to Roman rule was not inevitable:

The Britons readily submit to military service, payment of tribute, and other obligations imposed by government, provided that there is no abuse. That they bitterly resent; for they are broken in to obedience, but not as yet to slavery.

Is this the very first hint of the British regard for fair play? These comments were made in the context of the savage Boudican Revolt against the Romans. It was provoked by rapacious and corrupt Roman practices, and the sudden recall of monies lent to the British aristocracy by the Romans. The money was presumably to help with the expenses of Romanisation, and its sudden recall by Catus Decianus, the venal financial controller of the province, caused outrage. The loans were made by Claudius, and, according to Cassius Dio:

In addition Seneca, with a view to a good rate of interest, had lent the reluctant islanders 40,000,000 sesterces and had then called it all in at once, and not very gently. So rebellion broke out.

He continues:

But above all the rousing of the Britons ... was the work of Boudica, a woman of the British royal family who had uncommon intelligence for a woman ... When she had collected an army about 120,000 strong, Boudica mounted a rostrum... She was very tall and grim; her gaze was penetrating and her voice was harsh; she grew her long auburn hair to the hips and wore a large golden torque and a voluminous patterned cloak with a thick plaid fastened over it ... She made this speech:

"You have discovered the difference between freedom in humble circumstances and slavery amidst riches. Have we not suffered every variety of shameful and humiliating treatment from the moment that these people turned their attention to Britain Have we not been deprived wholesale of our most important possessions while paying taxes on the rest? Do we not pasture and till all our other property for them and then pay an annual tax on our very lives? How much better it would have been to be traded as slaves once and for all rather than ransom ourselves each year and meaninglessly call ourselves free! How much better to have died by the sword than live and be taxed for it! But why do I speak of death? Not even that is free with them; you know what we pay even for our dead".

It is doubtful that this is a verbatim speech by the British leader but it does at least tell us what the Romans thought the British felt about their subjection.

The inspired rebels destroyed Colchester, the province's capital and marched on London. Meanwhile the Roman Governor rushed back from campaigning in Anglesey against the Druids, and thereby introduced London itself into the history books as Tacitus records:

But Suetonius, undismayed, marched through disaffected territory to Londinium. This town did not rank as a Roman settlement, but was an important centre for businessmen

and merchandise. At first he hesitated whether to stand and fight there.

> ***Eventually his numerical inferiority ... decided him to sacrifice the single city of Londinium to save the province as a whole. Unmoved by lamentations and appeals, Suetonius gave the signal for departure. The inhabitants were allowed to accompany him, but those who stayed because they were women, or old, or attached to the place, were slaughtered by the enemy.***

According to Dio It was especially shameful for the Romans that it was a woman who brought all this upon them. And he describes the slaughter meted out to rebels in London and elsewhere with a certain horrified relish:

> ***Every kind of atrocity was inflicted upon their captives, and the most fearful bestiality was when they hung up naked the noblest and best-looking women. They cut off their breasts and stitched them to their mouths, so that the women seemed to be eating them, and after this they impaled them on sharp stakes run right up the body.***

The decisive battle was waged when Suetonius had gathered up as many troops as he could. Tacitus records that he carefully chose a defile with a wood behind him.:

> ***There could be no enemy ... except at his front, where there was open country without cover for ambushes... On the British side, cavalry and infantry bands seethed over a wide area in unprecedented numbers. Their confidence was such that they brought their wives with them to see the victory installing them in carts stationed at the edge of the battlefield. .. At first the (Roman) regular troops stood their ground. Keeping to the defile as a natural defence, they launched their javelins accurately at the approaching enemy. Then, in wedge formation they burst forward... The auxiliary infantry, the cavalry, too, with lances extended demolished all serious resistance. The remaining Britons fled with difficulty since the ring of waggons blocked the outlets. The Romans did not spare even the women. Baggage animals too, transfixed with weapons, added to the heaps of the dead.***

Scholars disagree over the likely site of this famous battle as the Roman authors give insufficient detail. It would appear that Suetonius came to London with an advance guard, and seeing the uselessness of defending London, retreated to meet up with his troops returning from Wales. He then choose to give battle.

The rebels appear to have concentrated in the territory of the Iceni, Trinovantes and Catevellauni, and the battle was likely to have been fought to the north west of London. Unsubstantiated legend places the battle at Kings Cross.

After the defeat Boudica committed suicide and the Roman Governor wreaked a terrible revenge for the estimated 70,000 slaughtered by the rebels. Faced with merciless vengeance the rebellion simmered so that the Emperor Nero

> ***even contemplated withdrawing the army from Britain, and only desisted from his purpose because he did not wish to appear to belittle the glory of his father*** ...

The situation was saved by the new Roman financial controller, Julius Alpinus Classicianus, who reported to Rome that there was no prospect of ending the war unless a successor was appointed to Suetonius (Tacitus). To their credit a new Governor was sent and a new policy of reconciliation was adopted.

Classicianus was buried in London in AD 65. His tomb records:

> ***To the Spirits of the dear departed ... Alpinus Classicianus. Procurator of the Province of***

Britain. Julia Pacata, daughter of Indus, his wife had this built.

He can thus lay claim to being the first Londoner in recorded history.

The Roman policy of pacification could clearly not rely on brute force. A more moderate policy relied on expanding the areas controlled by the Romans; while at the same time integrating the conquered areas into the Roman form of civilisation. The key to their method was to leave local customs alone as far as possible, while illustrating the superior virtues of the Roman way of life. The loans meted out to the local aristocracy were probably designed to help with the expenses of the new lifestyle. The subtleties of the process are cynically described by Tacitus describing the achievements of his own uncle Agricola Governor of Britain:

> ***Agricola had to deal with people living in isolation and ignorance, and therefore prone to fight; and his object was to accustom them to a life of peace and quiet by the provision of amenities. He therefore gave private encouragement and official assistance to the building of temples, public squares, and good houses. He praised the energetic and scolded the slack; and competition for honour proved as effective as compulsion. Furthermore, he educated the sons of the chiefs in the liberal arts, and expressed a preference for British ability as compared with the trained skills of the Gauls. The result was that instead of loathing our Latin language they became eager to speak it effectively. In the same way, our national dress came into favour and the toga was everywhere to be seen. And so the population was gradually led into the demoralising temptations of arcades, baths, and sumptuous banquets. The unsuspecting Britons spoke of such novelties as "civilisation", when in fact they were only a feature of their enslavement.***

Corroborative evidence for his statements comes from the archaeological record which indeed shows that Roman style bath houses and arcaded shopping complexes were being established throughout the British Province! The encouragement of the Latin tongue is attested by the appearance of graffiti in Latin. For example, scrawled in Latin on a Roman tile found in London, presumably left by a humble tile maker, was the following:

> ***Australis has been going off by himself every day these last thirteen days!***

And archaeologists have found letters which reveal the subtle process of Romanisation:

> ***Rufus, son of Callisunus, sends greeting to Epillicus, and all his fellows. I believe you know that I am well. If you have made the list please send it. Do look after everything carefully so that you turn the girl into cash.***

The most important point of this message is that the son (Rufus) has been given a Latin name by his Celtic father (Callisunus); the girl may well be a slave.

A sad Roman Londoner with something to hide scratched the following curse on a scrap of lead before consigning it to the River Walbrook:

> ***I curse Tretia Maria and her life and mind and memory and liver and lungs, mixed up together, and her words, thoughts and memory; thus may she be unable to speak what things are concealed...***

As Agricola pushed the frontier into the far north of Scotland, the lowland Celts had to choose between exile or accommodation with the new ruling power. Many would indeed have been seduced with the new-fangled urban life-style but not all Celts would be happy to trade in their plaid for togas, their mead for wine, Druids for priests, or freedom for civilisation. Many would bewail the ending of Celtic customs in the face of fashionable Roman ways. The following quotation by the playwright Plautus would have struck an echo with the Celts unused to the spicy Roman cuisine. The

Celts, after all, went in for plain unadorned fare: milk-fed cows, wild boar, hunks of meat. The speech is given by a cook in the play Pseudolus:

> ***I don't season a dinner the way other cooks do, who serve you up whole pickled meadows in their patinae - men who make cows their messmates, who thrust herbs at you and then proceed to season herbs with other herbs. They put in coriander, fennel, garlic, and norse parsley, they serve up sorrel, cabbage, beet and spinach... and pounding wicked mustard which makes the pounders' eyes water before they're finished. When they season their dinners they don't use condiments for seasoning but screech owls which eat out the intestines of the guests alive. That is why life is so short for men in this world, since they stuff their bellies with suchlike herbs fearful to speak of, not just to eat. Men will eat herbs which the cows leave alone.***

The Roman gourmet, in contrast to the Celtic simplicity, loved artifice - a typical dish (from Apicius) being a pate shaped like a fish but flavoured with garum or fish sauce and called `Fish Without Fish':

> ***Cook liver, grind and add pepper, and liquamen (fish sauce), or salt. Add oil: use hare, kid, lamb or chicken liver and mould into a fish in a small mould if liked:, sprinkle virgin oil over it.***

Apart from inscriptions and graffiti and one or two brief quotations in contemporary history books, there is no literary description of Roman London. So again to get a stronger flavour of everyday life we must turn to writers of Rome. First to the supreme epigramist Marcus Valerius Martialis - better known as Martial - who was himself a provincial, from North-east Spain, and was writing in Rome during the first 50 years of London's life.

In this first epigram Martial expresses a general frustration that writers and artists suffered in earlier times at the hands of their patrons. Without the protection of copyright laws, and a large reading public, an artist depended on the patronage of the rich and powerful. Sometimes they were genuine enthusiasts, but more often gave as little as possible to allow the patron to bask in reflected glory. An additional point to this anecdote is that patronage was one of the glues that held roman society together. Each morning the powerful would be besieged in their lobbies by supplicants seeking assistance and favours. Dependence upon patronage has enraged artists from Martial to Dr Johnson, and they have used their wit to have the last word:

> ***Now I'm no longer a paid client-guest,***
> ***Why should I put up with your second-best***
> ***Menu when you invite me out? You take***
> ***Choice oysters fattened in the Lucrine lake***
> ***While I suck whelks and cut my lips. You dine***
> ***On mushrooms - I'm given fungus fit for swine.***
> ***Turbot for you - for me brill. You enjoy***
> ***A splendid plump-arsed turtle-dove - I toy***
> ***With a magpie that died caged. Why, Ponticus,***
> ***Do we eat with you when you don't eat with us?***
> ***The dole's abolished - good: but what's the point***
> ***Unless our meat's carved from the same joint?***

The dole Martial mentions was a dole of bread given out to Roman citizens by the authorities.

The noise of a Roman town would have been a new experience and one that the philosopher, politician, courtier, and money-lender Seneca (letters 56 1-2) found not to his taste:

> ***My lodgings (in Rome) are right over the bath-house. Just imagine all the noises which***

> ***are loud enough to make me hate my ears! I can hear the grunts of men exercising strenuously by lifting lead weights ... or the slapping of hands on the shoulders when some chap is lying down having a cheap massage. On top of that, you've got the man who likes to hear his own voice in the bath or the chap who plunges into the swimming-pool with an enormous splash, as well as the penetrating, shrill voice of the manicurist advertising his trade. The only time he stops his chatter is when he's plucking armpits - and then it's the customer who's screaming!***

A more pithy epigram from Martial demonstrates the same point:

> ***If from the baths you hear a round of applause,***
> ***Maron's great member is bound to be the cause.***

Ovid, writing in Augustus' reign, provides our guide to the flesh-pots of a Roman town. This is how he recommends the aspiring male dresses for a night out on the town:

Don't torture your hair, though, with curling-iron: don't pumice
Your legs into smoothness. Leave that
To Mother Cybele's votaries, ululating in chorus
With their Phrygian modes. Real men
Shouldn't primp their good looks ...
... Keep pleasantly clean, take exercise, work up an outdoor
Tan; make quite sure that your toga fits
And doesn't show spots; don't lace your shoes too tightly,
Or ignore any rusty buckles, or slop
Around in too large a fitting. Don't let some incompetent barber
Ruin you looks: both hair and beard demand
Expert attention. Keep your nails pared, and dirt-free;
Don't let those long hairs sprout
In your nostrils, make sure your breath is never offensive.
Avoid the rank male stench
That wrinkles noses. Beyond this is for wanton women -
Or any half-man who wants to attract men.

The well dressed seeker after sex should follow Ovid into the heart of the town:

Here's what to do.
When the sun's on the back of Hercules' lion, stroll down some shady colonnade,
Pompey's, say , or Octavia's ...
... with its gallery of genuine Old Masters
...
But the theatre's curving tiers should form your favourite
Hunting-ground: here you are sure to find
The richest returns, be your wish for lover or playmate,
A one-night stand or a permanent affair.
...
Don't forget the races, either: the spacious circus offers
Chances galore. No need,
Here, of private finger-talk, or secret signals,
Nods conveying messages: you'll sit
Right beside your mistress, without let or hindrance,
So be sure to press against her wherever you can -
An easy task: the seating-divisions restrict her.

Regulations facilitate contact. Now find
Some excuse to engage in friendly conversation,
Casual small-talk at first -
Ask, with a show of interest, whose are those horses
Just coming past: find out
Her favourite, back it yourself. When the long procession of ivory
Deities approaches, be sure you give
A big hand to Lady Venus. If some dust should settle
In your girl's lap, flick it away
With your fingers: and if there's no dust, still flick away - nothing:
Let any excuse serve to prove your zeal.
If her cloak's trailing, gather it up, make a great business
Of rescuing it from the dirt -
Instant reward for your gallantry, a licensed peep at
Delectable ankles, and more.
Keep an eye on whoever may be sitting behind you
Don't let him rub his knee
Against her smooth back...

These lines were written, of course, about Rome - a Rome probably 20 times larger than London, but London was the largest town in the province of Britain, and we have every right to assume that it was the most sophisticated, most cosmopolitan of the Romano-British towns. Here, archaeologists have discovered cool colonnades around the forum, elegant interiors, marble lined bath-houses, amphitheatres, and even the castration tools used by the eunuch priests of the Cybele.

The forum of a Roman town was the central meeting place, used for offices, shops, market, meetings and political elections. Inscriptions show that the London forum was the home of the provincial assembly, and that local government in London continued down to the ward (vicus) level. Surviving political `posters' and graffiti from Pompeii provides some idea of the concerns of the Roman citizens:

> ***Neighbours! Vote L Status Receptus for duumvir. He is fine. Posted by Aemilius Celer Vicinus. A Plague on any wretch who scrubs this out!***
>
> ***Vote for M Casellius Marcellus, a good aedile. He will grant great Games!***
>
> ***Bruttius Balbus for duumvir. Genialis supports him. He will conserve the treasury.***
>
> ***Trebius for aedile! The barbers support him.***
>
> ***M. Cerrinius Vatia for aedile! All night drinkers back him. Vatia for aedile! The pickpockets back him!***
>
> ***Spend for the public welfare!***
>
> ***Keep the rates down!***

A duumvir was the chief magistrate of the town, the equivalent of the Consul in Rome, and he was helped by `junior' magistrates including aediles. As magistrates they were expected to fund public works and entertainments from their own pocket so they had to be independently wealthy or backed by wealthy interests. In addition a property qualification could be imposed. A surviving charter provides:

> ***A councillor of Tarentum...shall possess a building within the borders of the territory of***

Tarentum that shall be roofed with no fewer than 1,500 tiles.

Voting was strictly controlled, with returning officers, supervision by independent witnesses, and ballot boxes.

Finally, we return to Martial who provides his view of a happy life:

Of what does the happy life consist,
My dear friend Julius? Here's a list:
Inherited wealth no need to earn,
Fires that continually burn,
And fields that give a fair return,
No lawsuits, formal togas worn
Seldom, a calm mind, the freeborn
Gentleman's health and good physique,
Tact with the readiness to speak
Openly, friends of your own mind,
Guests of an easy-going kind,
Plain food, a table simply set,
Nights sober but wine-freed from fret,
A wife who's true to you and yet
No prude in bed, and sleep so sound
It makes the day come quickly round.
Be pleased with what you are, keep hope
Within that self-appointed scope:
Neither uneasily apprehend
Nor morbidly desire the end.

DECLINE & FALL

The first century of Roman rule saw London boom as it became the major financial, administrative and trading port in the new province. It must have been financed by huge inflows of money from the Roman Empire, but as the country matured as a member of the Empire, London lost its pre-eminence, and the thrusting expansionistic commercial centre declined into an administrative capital, not quite a garden city but no longer the sole hub of commerce. Houses were demolished, to be replaced by open land, and the densely packed commercial premises were replaced by calm court-yarded town houses.

At the same time as the density of population of the city declined, London's wall was constructed. It encompassed a larger area in order to take maximum defensive advantage of the local topography. The wall was built at about 180-200 AD. It was at this period that Albinus used Britain to launch his attempt on the imperial throne as Dio describes:

At that time (193 AD) three men, each of whom commanded three legions of citizens as well as large numbers of foreigners, were aiming at power; they were Severus, Niger and Albinus, the governors respectively of Pannonia, Syria, and Britain.

> ***Of the three generals ... Severus was the shrewdest; he had foreseen that ... the three of them would come into conflict and.. had determined to win over to his own side the one nearest to him. Accordingly he had sent a letter by trusted messenger to Albinus, appointing him Caesar.***

(At this time the emperor was called Augustus and subordinate leaders were given the honorific title of Caesar.)

> ***So Albinus, imagining that he was going to share the rule with Severus, remained where he was.***
>
> ***Severus had scarcely drawn breath after his foreign wars he was involved in another one, a civil war this time, against his Caesar, Albinus. (196 AD). Severus was no longer according him the rank of Caesar, now he had removed Niger... whereas Albinus was looking for the pre-eminent position of emperor.***

Herodian continues:

> ***When he heard that Severus was moving quickly and was on the point of arriving, Albinus, who was leading a life of inactivity and luxury, was thrown into considerable confusion. He crossed with an expeditionary force from Britain to the nearest part of Gaul and sent word to all the neighbouring provinces, telling the governors to send money and provision for the army. Some obeyed and sent them - to their cost for they paid the penalty in due course. Those who ignored his instructions made their decisions more by good luck than good judgement and were safe. Their decisions proved right or wrong according to how the war happened to go.***

Having defeated the hapless Albinus, Severus settled affairs in Britain and divided the authority there between two governors.

Successful as this restoration of authority was, it set a repetitive pattern that was eventually to lead to the ending of Roman influence in the island. Ambitious leaders soon came to understand that Britain provided an ideal off-shore base from which to launch a bid for the imperial throne. The division of the province into two probably reflects a fear of providing a power-base for a rival rather than devolution of power to increase the efficiency of the government machine.

Further strains on London's position developed as the freedom of international trade began to break down under increasing attack from barbarian raids and piracy on the high seas. Symptomatic of the increasing tension was the rebellion of the governor Carausius at the end of the third century. The late Roman historian Eutropius records:

> ***At this time Carausius, although of very humble birth, had achieved an outstanding reputation in a vigorous military career. He had been give the responsibility throughout the Belgic and Armorican areas, with his headquarters at Boulogne, of clearing the sea, which was infested by the Franks and Saxons. On many occasions he captured large numbers of barbarians but he failed either to return all the booty to the provincials or to send it to the emperor, and a suspicion grew that he was letting in the barbarians on purpose so that he could catch them as they passed with their booty and grow rich on the proceeds. So Maximianus ordered him to be put to death, whereupon he declared himself emperor and seized Britain.***

Britain at this time was described by Eumenius in his Panegyric to Constantius:

> ***Without doubt Britain, although but a single name, was a land that the state could ill afford to lose, so plentiful are its harvests, so numerous are the pasturelands in which it rejoices, so many are the metals which run through it, so much wealth comes from its taxes, so many ports encircle it, to such an immense area does it extend.***

London became Carausius' headquarters, and chief mint, and there he maintained his independence for six years but without making any progress towards the imperial purple. His career was cut short when he was murdered in a coup mounted by his finance minister Allectus in 296AD. Allectus himself was defeated and killed within three years when the commander of his praetorian guard revolted, and 'the restorer of eternal light' Caesar Constantine Chlorus, father of Constantine the Great routed the rebels. Eumenius continues:

> ***In very truth, invincible Caesar (Constantius), so willingly have all the immortal gods granted that you should slaughter every enemy you attack, and especially the Franks, that your other solders... reached London and in every direction throughout the city destroyed what was left from the battle of that horde of foreign mercenaries, who were planning to make good their escape after sacking the place. So to the inhabitants of your province they brought not only safety by the slaughter of the enemy but the pleasure too of witnessing it.***
>
> ***...The overjoyed Britons came with their wives and children to meet you. They gazed upon you as though you had descended from the skies above; and it was not only you they worshipped, but even the sails and oars of the ship which had conveyed your divine presence; and they were ready to feel you walk over their prostrated bodies. No wonder that they were transported with such joy; for after so many years of the most wretched captivity, after the violation of their wives, after the degrading servitude of their children, now at last they were free; now at last they were Roman; now at last they were revived by the true light of our rule.***

Although Constantius restored legitimacy, it was his own son who was the next usurper to launch a bid for Empire from Britain. This was the future Constantine the Great:

But after defeating the Picts his father Constantius died at York, and by the unanimous decision of his troops Constantine became Caesar.

From his British power-base he conquered the empire and made Christianity the leading religion in the land. This may not have been entirely unconnected with his time spent in Britain, as Britain had a long history of Christianity: in the early 3rd Century Christian authors Tertullian and Origen, wrote of:

> ***places in Britain, inaccessible to the Romans, which have submitted to Christ;***

and asked:

> ***When did the land of Britain, before the coming of Christianity, consent to a unified religion?***

This rhetorical question makes little, if any sense, if Christianity was not established in Britain by this time. These statements cannot be supported by the meagre archaeological evidence for Christianity in Roman Britain, but there is equally little physical evidence of Christianity after the conversion of Constantine in the early 4th Century. The most likely explanation is that the early Christian ritual was simple and hard to detect archaeologically.

A tradition in London reported by the Venerable Bede, Geoffrey of Monmouth and John Stow reinforces the likelihood of an early date for significant Christian activity. Bede wrote:

> ***In the year of our Lord's Incarnation 156 ... while the holy Eleutherus ruled the Roman Church, Lucius, a British King, sent him a letter asking to be made a Christian by his direction. This pious request was quickly granted, and the Britons received the Faith and held it peacefully in all its purity and fullness until the time of the Emperor Diocletian***

Stow reports:

> ***There remaineth in the Parish church of S. Peter uppon Cornhill in London, a table wherein is written that Lucius founded the same Church to be an Archbishops see, and Metropolitane or chiefe church of his kingdom, and that it so endured the space of foure hundred yeares, until the comming of Augustine the Monk & others from Rome, in the raigne of the Saxons. The archbishops names, I find onely to be set downe by Ioceline of Furnes, in his book of Brittish Bishoppes, and not else where. Thean (sayeth hee) was the first Archbishoppe of London in the time of Lucius, who builded the said church of S. Peter, in a place called Cornhill in London by the aide of Ciran, chiefe Butler to King Lucius.***
>
> ***Eluanus was the second and he builded a Library to the same church adioyning and conuerted many of the Druides (learned men in the Pagan law) to the Christian faith.***
>
> ***3. Cadar was the third, then followed,***
> ***4. Obinus.***
> ***5. Conan.***
> ***6. Paludius***
> ***7. Stephen***
> ***8. Iltute.***
> ***9. Dedwin.***
> ***10. Thedred.***
> ***11. Hillary.***
> ***12. Guidelium.***
> ***13. Vodimus slaine by the Saxons.***
> ***14. Theanus, the fourteenth, fledde with the Britaines into Wales, about the yeare of Christ 587.***

Stow doubts that they were Archbishops in fact but it is a verified fact that London sent one of the 3 bishops to attend the Council of Arles in AD 314 summoned by Constantine. The quotations above make it clear that a British king and his followers were converted to Christianity, but we can be less certain of the status of that king and where he came from. Tradition associates him with London, and

Gloucester where Geoffrey of Monmouth said he died. But he may have been of the royal line of any one of the many tribal groupings in Britain.

The legend of the Church at Cornhill is problematic because it is placed on the site of the Roman basilica - the roman town hall. This was felt by many archaeologist to make the legend risible. However, recent archaeological evidence suggests that this part of the basilica may have been demolished by the early 4th century, and although this means it is unlikely to have been the site of a Christian church in Lucius's day it could have become one later on. In the medieval period St Peter's was given precedence over St Paul's as the earliest church in London.

Although the Church may have improved the spiritual well-being of the Britons the continued barbarian attacks became more threatening as Ammianus Marcellinus makes clear:

> ***(AD 360): The savage tribes of the Scots and Picts were carrying out raids in Britain, having disrupted the agreed peace, and laying waste places near the frontiers. Fear hung over the provinces which were already worn out with the accumulated disasters of previous years...***
>
> ***(AD 364): At this time it was as if the trumpets were sounding the signal for the battle throughout the entire Roman world. The most savage nations rose and poured across the nearest frontiers. Simultaneously the Alamanni were plundering Gaul and Raetia; the Sarmatae and Quadi were attacking Pannonia; the Picts, Saxons, Scots and Attacotti harassed Britain in a never-ending series of disasters...***
>
> ***(AD 367): Serious and alarming news reached him [Valentinian] to the effect that a conspiracy of the barbarians had brought Britain to her knees; Count Nectaridus, officer responsible for coastal defences, had been killed and the General Fullofaudes had been circumvented by the enemy.***

Count Theodosius was chosen to lead a expedition to Britain to rescue the country from the so-called Barbarian Conspiracy. He:

> ***made for London, the old town called Augusta in more recent times. Subdividing his forces into many separate groups, he attacked the marauding bands of the enemy who were loaded down with plunder, quickly put to flight those who were driving along prisoners and cattle, and seized the booty taken from the wretched subject population. This he restored to its owners, all except for a small part which was made over to his weary soldiers. Up to now the city had been overwhelmed by the greatest hardships, but suddenly, before rescue could have been expected, it was restored; and he entered it in triumph, like the hero of an ovation.***

Theodosius reorganised the defences of the province, and withdrew. The threats to the Romano-British urban civilisation were by this time clear: firstly, the province was threatened by attacks from beyond the Roman Pale from Ireland, Scotland, Germany and parts of Scandinavia; secondly, the country was threatened by the imperial ambitions of the military leaders who siphoned off troops from defensive work to military adventures; thirdly, the strain these threats imposed was diluting the glue that held the empire together. The benefits of Roman civil administration and of access to the unified European, Mediterranean and Middle Eastern trading zones were becoming less apparent, as international communications were threatened. Roman leaders were torn between the conflicting need for strong defence against external attack and the fear of acting as quarter-master for the ambitions of an imperial rival.

The method the Romans chose was to divide and rule. The empire formerly ruled by one emperor became divided between various Augusti and subordinate Caesars. Provinces were sub-divided and the military command structures fragmented. Britain, originally one province, first became two, then

four separate provinces. The unified military structure under the Governor was replaced by weak frontier detachments, a 'Saxon Shore' coastal defense under a count, and a mobile field army lead by a duke. This neither succeeded in staunching the bloody inroads of the barbarians nor thwarted the ambitions of the military leaders. Indeed it provided an unending stream of ambitious candidates for the title of usurper. The weakness of the system is attested by the frequent need for the Romans to 'rescue' Britain by dispatching armies from the continent to restore peace.

The end was approaching fast and the years before the final end of Roman rule saw a succession of local military leaders take over the province and launch attacks on the empire. As Orosius wrote:

> ***AD 383: Maximus, an active and honourable man who deserved the rank of Augustus but for his defying his sacred oath and assuming illegal power, was made emperor almost against his will by the army in Britain and crossed to Gaul. There he terrified the Augustus Gratian by his sudden invasion and ... he ensnared and killed him; and he drove his brother, the Augustus Valentinian, from Italy.***

Maximus was soon captured and executed. In AD 400 the Roman general Stilicho again restored the shattered province's peace. But in AD 407 Zosimus records:

> ***...the soldiers in Britain rebelled and made Marcus emperor, obeying him as though he were the ruler of that area. But he did not suit their ways and so they killed him and promoted Gratian (Note: unrelated to the previous Gratian!). They awarded him the purple robe and crown and gave him a bodyguard as though he were emperor. But, not finding him to their liking either, after four months they deposed and killed ham and handed imperial rule to Constantine.***
>
> Orosius added:
>
> ***Constantine, who had come from the lowest ranks of the army, was elected in his place solely on account of the confidence inspired by his name and not because of any brave service. As soon as he assumed power he crossed to Gaul.***

So, in 407 AD the last of the Roman troops were withdrawn, and in 410 the Romans acknowledged their inability to help Britain any more and told them to look after their own defences. Zosimus suggests that the final end was partly a result of a national revolt against Roman rule:

> ***... the barbarians from across the Rhine, who now attacked in force, reduced the inhabitants of Britain and some of the Celtic tribes to the point of throwing off Roman rule and living independently without further submission to Roman laws.***
>
> ***So the Britons took up arms and facing danger for their own safety they freed their cities from the barbarians who threatened them and all Armorica and other provinces of Gaul followed the British example and freed themselves in the same way, expelling their Roman governors and setting up their own administrations as best they could.***

Looking back from the 8th Century the Venerable Bede gives a graphic description of the anarchy that ensued:

> ***On the departure of the Romans, the Picts and Scots, learning that they did not mean to return, were quick to return themselves, and becoming bolder than ever, occupied all the northern and outer parts of the island up to the wall, as if it belonged to them. Here a dispirited British garrison stationed on the fortifications pined in terror night and day, while from beyond the wall the enemy constantly harassed them with hooked weapons, dragging the cowardly defenders down from their wall and dashing them to the ground. At length the Britons abandoned their cities and wall and fled in disorder, pursued by their***

> ***foes. The slaughter was more ghastly than ever before and the wretched citizens were torn in pieces by their enemies, as lambs are torn by wild beasts. They were driven from their homesteads and farms and sought to save themselves from starvation by robbery and violence against one another, their internal anarchy adding to the misery caused by others, until there was no food left in the whole land except whatever could be obtained by hunting.***

Bede records that in 447 AD

> ***The Britons consulted what was to be done... and they all agreed with King Vortigern to call over to their aid from the parts beyond the sea, the Saxon nation.***

The strategy appears to have been highly successful - for this is the last record of the Picts causing major problems in the old Roman province. However, the Saxons turned against their employers and began to settle in the old Roman province. The exact geo-political structure of Britain at this time is unclear from the fragmented sources available, but there are some indications. The consultation process mentioned by Bede suggests that Roman local government structure continued after the Romans left - there are indeed a few references to Roman official titles still being used.

It is possible that London retained some role as an administrative capital or a last refuge for the invaders as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle makes clear:

> ***456: In this year Hengist and Aesc fought against the Britons at a place which is called Creganford (Crayford?) and there slew 4,000 men: and the Britons then forsook Kent and fled to London in great terror.***

Archaeology has, as yet, revealed little to enlighten us about this period of the city's history, which probably confirms the abandonment of London by the mass of the population. The walled City of London may have provided too large an area to defend, and it is possible that the Celts may have fortified the old Roman fort which is under the ground near the present Museum of London or perhaps even the old Roman amphitheatre. But it seems clear that the advantages that London formerly held were destroyed when the unity of the province was disrupted, and it turned into a deserted shell. An anonymous Saxon poet wrote in the 'Ruin':

> ***Wondrous is this stone-wall, wrecked by fate;***
> ***The city-buildings crumble, the works of the giants decay.***
> ***Roofs have caved in, towers collapsed,***
> ***Barred gates are broken, hoar frost clings to mortar,***
> ***Houses are gaping, tottering, and fallen,***
> ***Undermined by age. The earth's embrace,***
> ***Its fierce grip, holds the mighty craftsman;***
> ***They are perished and gone. A hundred generations***
> ***Have passed away since then. This wall, grey with lichen***
> ***And red of hue, outlines kingdom after kingdom,***

The Romano-Celtic inhabitants of London may have held out for a number of years, and it is just conceivable that London, important symbolically, may even have had some part to play in a possible Arthurian golden age. However, the anarchy of the period did not allow the revival of true urban culture.

In fact, there is much argument among archaeologists as to whether the Dark Ages were indeed dark and anarchic or whether the reality might have been somewhat less horrific. Ken Dark sees Britain as very much in the Late Antique mainstream of European culture - post-Roman perhaps in the same way we are post-Modern? The contrast with the Romans seems so stark to us because most of our archaeology has been concentrated on the towns and Roman Villa's. These certainly are abandoned

by or during the 5th Century AD. But their impact on our imagined past is much greater, some would argue, than the reality because Towns and Villas are simple for archaeologists to find. Recent intensive archaeological excavation has reminded us that the vast majority of people lived a simple life in the country hardly different from the pre-Roman Britons. The presence of the Roman Army appears to have acted as an economic cement that held up an urban and villa based elite infrastructure. As the army progressively withdraw and its conditions of employment changed from a coin based payment system to a payment in kind system the glue weakened, the elite infrastructure collapsed but life would have gone on much the same for the 90% of the people who were only peripherally affected by the Roman Civilisation.

New leaders developed probably from the landed gentry and there was even some reuse of pre-roman hillforts.

The following heroic 'Olwen and Cullwhch' is found in the Mabinogion and illustrates the sort of story told by the Britons:

The young warrior Cullwhch approaches Arthur's court (imagine a dark night at the gate to a palisaded hill-fort atop a Celtic hill):

> ***Quoth the youth: 'Is there a porter?'***
>
> ***'There is. And thou, may thy head not be thine, that thou dost ask! I am porter to Arthur each first day of January, but my deputies for the year save then, none other than Huandaw, and Gogigwr and Llaesgymyn, and Penpingion who goes upon his head to spare his feet, neither heavenwards nor earthwards, but like a rolling stone on a court floor.'***
>
> ***'Open the gate.'***
>
> ***'I will not'***
>
> ***'Why wilt thou not open it?'***
>
> ***'Knife has gone into meat, and drink into horn, and a thronging in Arthur's hall. Save the son of a king of a rightful dominion, or a craftsman who brings his craft, none may enter. Meat for thy dogs and corn for thy horse, and hot peppered chops for thyself, and wine brimming over, and delectable songs before thee. Food for 50 men shall come to thee in the hospice, there men from afar take their meat, and the scions of other countries who do not proffer a craft in Arthur's court. It will be no worse for thee there than for Arthur in the court: a woman to sleep with thee, and delectable songs before thee. Tomorrow at tierce, when the gate is opened for the host that came here to-day, for thee shall the gate be opened first and thou shalt sit wherever thou wilt in Arthur's Hall from its upper end to its lower.'***
>
> ***The youth said: 'I will do nothing of that. If thou open the gate, all is well. If thou open it not, I will bring dishonour upon thy lord and ill report upon thee. And I will raise three shouts at the entrance of this gate, so that it shall not be less audible on the top of Pengwaedd in Cornwall and in the depths of Dinsel in the North and in Esgeir Oerfel in Ireland. And every woman with child that is in this court shall miscarry, and such of them as are not with child in their wombs shall turn to a burden within them, so that they may never bear child from this day forth.***
>
> ***Quoth Glewlwyd Mighty-Grasp: 'Shout as much as thou wilt about the laws of Arthur's court, thou shalt not be let in till first I go and have word with Arthur.'***
>
> ***...Quoth Arthur: 'If thou didst enter walking go thou out running. And he that looks up***

the light, and opens his eye and shuts it, an injunction upon him. And let some serve with golden drinking horns, and others with hot peppered chops, so that there be ample meat and drink for him. A shameful thing it is to leave in wind and rain a man such as thou tellest of.'

The two cultures slogged it out in a series of small scale battles, and the slow progress of the Saxon advance was only slowed and possibly reversed temporarily under the leaders Ambrosius Aurelius and the legendary King Arthur. Arthurian legend places him all over the country but the strongest associations are areas known to be free of Saxon control in the 5th and 6th Centuries. London appears too deeply within the Saxon sphere for scholars to take the London Arthurian legends seriously. But London does have its own share of Arthurian connections; we have already mentioned the Tower Hill story but another one, related by Thomas Malory, places the Sword in the Stone tale bang in the centre of London:

So in the greatest church of London - whether it were Paul's or not the French book makes no mention - all the estates were, long ere day, in the church for to pray. And when matins and the first mass was done there was seen in the church yard, against the High Altar, a great stone four square, like unto a marble stone, and in midst thereof was like an anvil of steel a foot on high, and therein stuck a fair sword, naked by the point. And letters there were written in gold about the sword that said thus: "Whoso pulls out this sword from this stone and anvil is rightwis King born of all England" ....

So upon New Year's Day ...it happed that Sir Ector, that had great livelode about London, rode unto the jousts, and with him rode Sir Kay, his son, and young Arthur, that was his nourished brother... Sir Kay had lost his sword ...so he prayed young Arthur for to ride for his sword ...

...he came to the churchyard...alighted and tied his horse to the stile. And so he went to the tent and found no knights there for they were at jousting. And so he handled the sword by the handles and lightly and fiercely pulled it out of the stone.

Thus Arthur became king. Whoever Arthur might be there is definite evidence that the Saxon advance was delayed for a generation or more. Their ultimate victory was not threatened however. By AD 604, when St Paul's was founded by the Augustinian mission the Saxons were definitely in control of London.

THE ENGLISH

The first written language in London was Latin although many of the local people probably spoke the Britonnic dialect of the Celtic languages. At some time in the Dark Ages the language of the area changed to the English dialect of German. How much blood shed and gene swapping this language change results from we do not know. A strong oral tradition developed however based on the raw strength of Old English. We can imagine the Halls of the Kings reverberating to epic tales told on both sides of the North Sea. One such is Beowulf (this version is thought to date from the late 10th Century):

There was laughter of heroes, harp-music ran,
Words were warm-hearted, Wealhtheow moved,
Mindful of courtesies, The Queen of Hrothgar,
Glittering to greet the Geats in the hall,
Peerless lady; but to the land's guardian
She offered first the flowing cup,
Bade him be blith at the beer-drinking,
Gracious to his people, gladly the conqueror
Partook of the banquet, tasted the hall- cup

The Christian Church preserved Latin as the language of choice for religion, law and history. In the 8th Century the Venerable Bede wrote down the tales of conquest of England by his people and his God. Although Christianity had survived and indeed prospered in the Celtic parts of Britain after the fall of the Roman Empire, Bede saw the conversion of the English to Christianity by the Augustinian Mission of 597AD as far more important. Indeed he accused the Christian British of neglecting their Christian duty to evangelise their Saxon conquerors, The Saxon's therefore remained pagan until 597AD when St. Augustine converted the King of Kent in Canterbury. King Ethelbert was the leading King in Britain and had influence over London now the capital of the East Saxon Kingdom. Augustine sent a colleague Mellitus (later Saint) to be bishop to the King of the East Saxons. Bede described the clash of religions:

..'in the year of our Lord 604. ... Mellitus was appointed to preach in the province of the East Saxons... Its capital is the city of London, which stands on the banks of the Thames, and is a trading centre for many nations who visit it by land and sea...

'When this province too had received the faith through the preaching of Mellitus, King Ethelbert (of Kent) built a church dedicated to the holy Apostle Paul in the city of London, which he appointed as the episcopal see of Mellitus and his successors.

..'In the year of our Lord 616...the death of the Christian King Sabert of the East Saxons aggravated the upheaval for, when he departed for the heavenly kingdom he left three sons, all pagans, to inherit his earthly kingdom. These were quick to profess idolatry, which they had pretended to abandon during the lifetime of their father, and encouraged their people to return to the old gods. It is told that when they saw Bishop Mellitus offering solemn Mass in church, they said with barbarous presumption: 'Why do you not offer us the white bread which you used to give to our father Saba (for so they used to call him), while you continue to give it to the people in church?' The Bishop answered. 'If you will be washed in the waters of salvation as your father was, you may share in the consecrated bread, as he did; but so long as you reject the water of life, you are quite unfit to receive the Bread of Life'. They retorted: 'We refuse to enter that font and see no need for it; but we want to be strengthened with this bread.' The Bishop then carefully and repeatedly explained that this was forbidden, and that no one was admitted to receive the most holy Communion without the most holy cleansing of Baptism. At last they grew very angry, and

> ***said: 'If you will not oblige us by granting such an easy request, you shall no longer remain in our kingdom.' And they drove him into exile, and ordered his followers to leave their borders.'***

It was not until 653 that Christianity again returned to London.